

What is a Fire Adapted Human Community?

Similiar Answers from Different Sources

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Until recently, when the phrase “fire adapted community” was entered into a computer search engine, thousands of articles about ecological adaptation would appear. This has changed. Now, a number of resources are available on the Web for identifying and creating fire adapted human communities (there is even a Wikipedia entry), and the concept is becoming an area of research not only in the ecological sciences but also in the social sciences. Below are examples of how these sources answer the question: What is a fire adapted human community?

Quadrennial Fire Review (http://www.iafc.org/files/wild_QFR2009Report.pdf)

We probably have the Quadrennial Fire Review to thank for advancing the concept fire adapted human communities (National Wildfire Coordinating Group 2009). The Quadrennial Fire Review is produced by fire experts every four years to advance a unified fire management strategy for the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior. The 2009 Review promotes four mission strategies: (1) moving to strategic management response within asymmetric fire, (2) reshaping emergency response within fire leadership, (3) building a new national intergovernmental wildfire policy framework, and (4) achieving fire adapted communities. Although the Review promoted fire adapted communities, it does not define fire adapted community rather it suggests several elements of such a community:

1. Has community defensible space and fuel reduction zones for the wildland urban interface (WUI)
2. Enables, where appropriate, leave-early-or-stay-and-defend policies for property owners
3. Recalibrates public expectations for fire adapted communities

The Review identifies components of a checklist that might be used to identify a fire adapted community that includes:

1. Defensible space
2. Fuels treatment programs
3. Ingress/egress and infrastructure standards
4. Local wildfire response capacity
5. Building codes/ordinances and spacing/density requirements for new and established structures

WUI Mitigation Committee of NWCG

<http://www.nwcg.gov/branches/ppm/wuimc/index.htm>

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) is an interagency organization that provides leadership to the wildland fire community regarding training, standards, and other functions. The NWCG's work is conducted by committees, including the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Mitigation Committee that provides leadership, input, and recommendations for achieving fire adapted human communities in the WUI. Committee members Jane Arteaga and Kate Dargen identified 5 types of adaptations that are necessary to developing fire adapted communities, and elements that would contribute to each type of adaptation:

1. Social adaptations
 - a. Community values
 - b. Grass-roots/community organizations
 - c. Citizen involvement
 - d. Business community stability
2. Political adaptations
 - a. Political institutions
 - b. Policy-making input
 - c. Regulatory policy/philosophy
 - d. Governmental/agency
3. Ecological adaptations
 - a. Fire regimes/conditions
 - b. Watershed stability/health
 - c. Fire fuels characteristics
 - d. Biodiversity values

4. Emergency management adaptations
 - a. Preparedness
 - b. Mitigation
 - c. Response
 - d. Recovery
5. Community hardening/development adaptations
 - a. Codes/ordinances/zoning
 - b. Community design
 - c. Infrastructure (roads, water...)
 - d. Evacuation corridors/areas
 - e. Community information systems

Firewise Communities (<http://www.firewise.org/Communities.aspx>)

The National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) Firewise Communities Program focuses on "saving lives and property from wildfire." The program is a project of the NWCG's WUI Mitigation Committee, and is funded by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior. The heart of the program is the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program that encourages communities in all parts of the country to achieve a high level of protection against WUI fire and contribute to sustainable ecosystems by offering courses and training and opportunities for WUI community members to network with each other. Steps required to become a Firewise Community contribute to that community becoming adapted to living with wildfire. A Firewise community has:

1. Assessed the community's fire risk
2. Formed a board or committee to accept the community assessment and take action to do something about it
3. Developed an action plan and monitoring plan
4. Involved local residents in a community activity day
5. Invested in mitigation activities

Fire Adapted Community Web Site (<http://www.fireadapted.org/>)

The NFPA, U.S. Forest Service, and a coalition of wildland fire management agencies have collaborated on a new Fire Adapted Community Web site. The Web site defines a fire adapted community as a community that takes responsibility for its wildfire risk. It suggests that the more actions community members take to protect community assets and reduce wildland fire risk the more fire adapted it becomes. The Web site characterizes the process of becoming fire adapted, and offers residents and homeowners, fire and emergency responders, fire and land managers, and civic and community leaders information and specific actions they can take to reduce wildfire risk.

Ready, Set, Go! (<http://www.wildlandfirersg.org/learn/index.cfm?navItemNumber=500>)

Firefighters are among the most respected and trusted members of their communities. The Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) Program brings together firefighters, through the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and other stakeholders in wildland fire management, in an effort to encourage residents to take personal responsibility for preparing for wildfire and become involved in community efforts to address the problem. It does this by “amplifying” the preparedness messages put forth by Firewise and other existing wildland fire public education efforts. One of the goals of the RSG! Program is to provide the guidance and implementation tools for fire departments to help their communities become fire adapted. The program defines a fire adapted community as one that “can withstand the devastating effects of a wildland fire.” For further information on becoming fire adapted, the RSG! Program sends visitors to its Web site to the Fire Adapted Community Web Site (above).

Community Wildfire Protection Planning (CWPP)

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) encourages communities to develop CWPPs to reduce their wildland fire risk and promote healthier forested ecosystems. To be a CWPP as defined in HFRA, a plan must:

1. Be developed collaboratively by multiple stakeholders and “agreed to” by representatives of the applicable local government (for example, homeowner association, city or county government), local fire departments, and the state agency responsible for forest management, in consultation with federal land management agencies

2. Identify and prioritize land requiring hazardous fuels reduction, and recommend the type and method of treatment
3. Recommend ways to reduce structural ignitability

Jakes and Sturtevant (in review) suggest that developing a CWPP moves a community towards being fire adapted, and offer a model to describe the process:

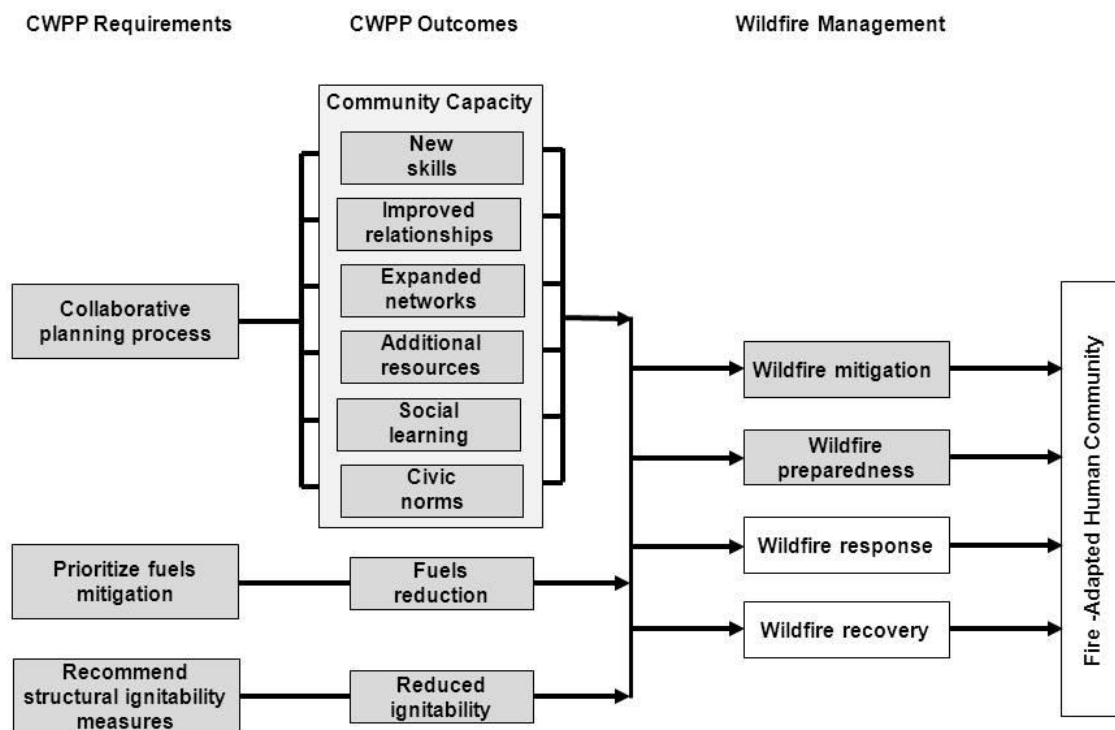


Figure 1.—Community wildfire protection planning (CWPP) requirements, that a collaborative process be used to prioritize areas for fuels mitigation and to recommend measures to reduce structural ignitability, produce outcomes that contribute to wildfire management and a community being adapted for wildfire. Research supporting the relationships indicated by the shaded boxes is found in Jakes et al. (2007, 2011)

Literature Cited

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